THE FIRST DAYS OF THE REVOLUTION IN PETROGRAD

The revolt had come almost as unexpectedly to the political parties, the Duma, and the government in Petrograd as to us in Irkutsk. The murder of Rasputin—December 17, 1916—had been a mortal blow for the Romanov dynasty. Many conservatives believed that a palace revolution was the only way to prevent the overthrow of the monarchy by a popular uprising that would bring radical elements to power. But then it was too late.

On March 8 riots broke out in Petrograd with a street demonstration of seventy to eighty thousand striking workers in the outskirts of the city. At its start crowds of workers milled about in the streets, while queues of women lined the sidewalks before the grocery shops and bakeries. Neither queues nor demonstrations were an unusual sight in Petrograd, but on that day the women joined the demonstrations and the angry crowds began to snowball. Slogans demanding "Bread! Higher wages!" appeared from nowhere over the crowds. Some bakeries were raided. Thousands of workers went into the streets to manifest their sympathy with the strikers. Before evening, new slogans floated in the air: "Away with the police! Away with Tsarism! Away with the war!" But unrest was still limited to the industrial outskirts of the capital, and the newspapers described it as a local, non-political affair.

On March 9 disorder continued on a large scale and spread to other parts of the city. Striking workers demanded higher wages to compensate for the rise in the price of bread. Crowds of strikers invaded the center of the city, where they were joined by the students. More bakeries were raided, and revolutionary slogans and outcries were seen and heard everywhere. But the government was slow to realize the seriousness of the situation and made no attempt to quell or localize the unrest. Nor was any step taken to negotiate with the strikers.

On March 10 the strike became general. Though its purpose was to protest against low wages and high prices, many banners bore the slogan "Away with war!" Police posts were withdrawn and the angry crowds rolled through the capital unopposed. They stopped in front of police stations, broke in, manhandled the officers, took their arms, and moved on.

Cossacks were sent to clear the streets in the center of the city. In several places they refused to obey the order to charge. Some left their outfits and joined the workers. By evening the Cossacks had become the people's heroes. Events had gotten out of the hands of civil and military authorities, and the Minister of the Interior sent a telegram